



FROM THE DESK OF THE DDSN MEDICAL CONSULTANT

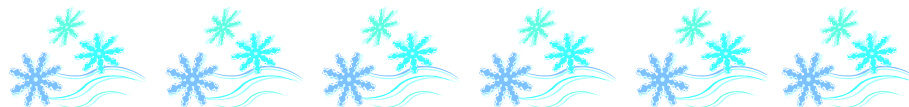
INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Protect from cold, wet and wind
- Cover head, hands and feet
- Avoid alcohol
- Shivering needs attention
- Hypothermia is an emergency

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COLD WEATHER



December is a month of celebrations, and it is the start of winter. Indeed, the weather has already warned us that we need to watch for cold changes. This newsletter will address a few things we need to consider so that we can enjoy the season safely.

In cold weather, our bodies need to maintain our systems working and avoid heat loss. If we lose too much heat and our temperature falls, we shiver to increase blood flow and maintain heat. If our temperature falls, we can become confused, extremely tired, and have irregular heart beat. A person who is becoming hypothermic shows signs of shivering, slurred speech, sleepiness, and cool, pale skin with blue lips. This stage is an emergency and the person must be brought to someplace warm, and seek medical assistance as soon as possible. Please do not disregard shivering - anyone who is shivering is losing heat and must be warmed. Exposed areas or areas with slow circulations such as ears, nose, hands and feet can have local changes that lead to frostbite in extreme cases. If these areas get red and cold, they need warming. Do not use intense heat.

To avoid these complications of exposure, we need to be careful of those who do not move about much, as they can get cold quickly. Also, we need to assist those consumers who do not have sufficient judgment to cover up well. Infants and older people also need special care and protection in the cold weather.

A large part of our body heat is lost through our head, hands and feet, and keeping warm needs special care. Wind evaporates water from clothes if they are damp, and this has a cooling effect. We need to protect ourselves against clothes getting damp and against wind. Outerwear should protect against wind and water. Layers of clothing trap dry air and help insulate better than single, thick garments. A hat, scarf or hood over the head is vital. Gloves are a priority and dry socks help (carry extra). The cooling effect of wind on exposed skin is very serious and can lead to hypothermia.

If your consumers are in wheelchairs, please check their back carefully to see that it is fully covered. It is easy to hitch clothes up as we put the person in the wheelchair. Please check to make sure there is a cover behind their legs, and that they have adequate wind and water protection on their feet. Most of all, consider whether they need to go out. All of us may enjoy the winter scenery, but some need only a short time in the stress of the cold environment. Those of our consumers, who have hypothalamic problems and are always hypothermic, should not go out in a cool environment. If you are going out in really cold weather, be sure to cover your head, hands, feet, and reduce your time outside, if anyone shows shivering or cold stress.



Alcohol

In a season of celebrations, alcohol is often part of the festivities. Alcohol reduces the capacity of our body to judge cold and to adjust to it. Be extra careful drinking alcohol in cold weather, it can be a bad combination. We all know that drinking and driving is dangerous too, so PLEASE be sensible in both these situations.



Greetings

I wish all reader a joyous and safe holiday season, and good things for 2003. I also wish to thank the people who have helped with the information gathering, organization, preparation and distribution of this newsletter. Dr Koyle, Marilyn Roberts, Michele Amritt, John Breidling, and help with health information from Dr. Siegel, Cathy Morris and Cassandra Coaxum.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

